

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 DAMASCUS 0953

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PEPR SY LE XF
SUBJ: KHADDAM REVIEWS LEBANESE DEVELOPMENTS

SUMMARY: CONGRATULATED KHADDAM FOR SYRIAN AND LEBANESE
DISPLAY OF LEADERSHIP OVER PST WEEK WHICH HAD SERVED
TO CONTAIN CRISES CREATED BY FAYYADIYA INCIDENTS. REVIEWER
OUR EFFORTS IN BEIRUT AND ISRAEL TO BE OF HELP. ASKED FOR HIS
VIEWS ON PROSPECTS FOR LEBANESE STABILITY, HE REPLIED HE THOUGHT
THEY WERE RELATIVELY GOOD. STRESSED THAT ALL ACTIONS SYRIA HAD TAKEN
HAD BEEN AT REQUEST OF SARKIS AND LEBANESE MILITARY AUTHORITIES.
HE MAINTAINS THAT INVESTIGATIVE COMMITTEE AND MIXED COURT
WILL HAVE COMPETENCE OVER ALL FOUND GUILTY OF INSTIGATING
FAYYADIYA INCIDENTS. ASSAD, FONMIN SAID, HAD NEVER
SAID REGULAR LEBANESE ARMY SHOULD BE DISBANDED. NONE-
THELESS, LEBANESE LEADERS, BOTH CHRISTIAN AND MUSLIM,
HAD GIVEN KHADDAM IMPRESSION THEY WERE DISSATISFIED WITH
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CURRENT STATUS OF LEBANESE FORCES WHICH WERE NOT RESPONSIVE
TO ORDERS OF LEBANESE PRESIDENT. CHRISTIAN LEADERS
ALLEGEDLY WERE WORRIED ABOUT UNDISCIPLINED BEHAVIOR OF
THEIR FOLLOWERS. MORE MUSLIMS NEED TO BE INCLUDED AND
BE BETTER INTEGRATED INTO LEBANESE ARMY. SYRIA, HOWEVER,
CONCIDERED THIS WAS PROBLEM FOR LEBANESE THEMSELVES TO
SOLVE AND NOT ONEIN WHICH SYRIA HAS RIGHT TO INTERFERE.

END SUMMARY.

1. IN FEBRUARY 15 ONE AND HALF HOUR EVENING MEETING WITH FONMIN KHADDAM, WE REVIEWED LEBANESE DEVELOPMENTS, SADAT VISIT TO WASHINGTON, AND ATHERTON VISIT TO AREA. PON'QF/B SUBJECTS COVERED BY SEPTEL. ALSO ADVISED HIM OF PRESIDENT CARTER'S INVITATION TO BEGIN. MEETING TOOK PLACE AFTER SEVERAL DAYS' WAIT AND LAST MINUTE POSTPONEMENT BY KHADDAM FROM NOON TO EVENING, CAUSED BY HIS BEING SUMMONED TO SEE ASSAD.

2. I SAID BOTH SYRIA AND LEBANON DESERVE CONGRATULATIONS FOR THEIR DISPLAY OF ACTIVE LEADERSHIP OF THE PAST WEEK WHICH HAD SERVED TO CONTAIN THE CRISIS AFTER THE FAYYADIYA INCIDENTS AND KEPT THEM FROM THREATENING THE SECURITY ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE LAST 16 MONTHS IN LEBANON. SAID WE RECOGNIZED THE PROVOCATION OF SYRIAN FORCES AND DEPLORED THE DEATHS WHICH HAD OCCURRED. AT SAME TIME, WE CONSIDERED THAT FURTHER MILITARY ACTION WOULD HAVE RISKED DAMAGING THE PROGRESS SYRIA HAD MADE IN RESTORING STABILITY TO LEBANON. REVIEWED AMBASSADOR PARKER'S EFFORTS IN BEIRUT TO URGE CHRISTIAN AND OTHER LEBANESE FRACTIONAL LEADERS TO SHOW RESTRAINT. NOTED THERE ARE SOME WITHIN THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY--FORTUNATELY NOT THE LEADERS--WHO WERE APPARENTLY HOPING THE RECENT CONFLICT WOULD WIDEN, INCLUDING SOME WHO WANTED TO SEE LEBANON PARTITIONED. A FURTHER PROBLEM WAS THE CERTAIN
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EXTREMIST ELEMENTS HAVE APPARENTLY BEEN SAYING THE ISRAELIS ARE ENCOURAGING CHRISTIANS TO CONFRONT THE SYRIAN FORCES, IMPLYING AS WELL THAT THE ISRAELIS ARE READY TO INTERVENE TO SUPPORT THEM IN SUCH AN EVENT. WE HAD RAISED THIS WITH THE ISRAELIS LEADERSHIP LAST SATURDAY AND BEEN ASSURED THAT THEY HAD NO INTENTION OF GETTING INVOLVED AND THAT GOI HAD PASSED WORD PREVIOUSLY TO CERTAIN LEBANESE ELEMENTS TO "COOL IT" IN NORTH. SAID WE BELIEVED CLODE COOPERATION BETWEEN ASSAD AND SARKIS WAS THE KEY NOT ONLY TO COPING WITH THE LATEST CRISIS BUT WILL BE ESSENTIAL TO DEVELOPING GREATER STABILITY IN THE LEBANESE POLITICAL SCENE. WE WERE CONVINCED THAT RENEWAL OF STRIFE WOULD BE AGAINST THE INTERESTS OF BOTH LEBANON AND SYRIA. THEN ASKED KHADDAM FOR HIS VIEWS ON PROSPECTS FOR LEBANESE STABILITY AND PARTICULARLY WHAT VALUE HE PLACED ON THE NEWLY ESTABLISHED MIXED COURT.

3. KHADDAM REPLIED THAT THE THOUGHT PROSPECTS FOR CONTINUED CALM WERE RELATIVELY GOOD. HE WISHED TO EMPHASIZE THAT AT NO POINT DURING THE PAST WEEK HAD THERE BEEN ANY DISAGREEMENT BETWEEN THE SYRIAN AND LEBANESE GOVERNMENTS. THE LATEST CRISIS HAD ERUPTED AGAINST THE BACKGROUND OF DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE GOL AND "SOME CHRISTIAN ELEMENTS."

HE THEN REVIEWED THE EVENTS OF FEB 7-8 ALONG LINES ALREADY COVERED BY EMBASSY BEIRUT, STRESSING IT WAS SARKIS WHO HAD CHARGED ADF COMMANDER KHATIB WITH EXPANDING THE SYSTEM OF ROADBLOCKS AND PLANNING NEW SECURITY MEASURES IN THE WAKE OF A RISING LEVEL OF TENSION AND INCIDENTS IN BEIRUT. KHATIB IN TURN HAD DIRECTED THE SYRIANS TO BUILD A ROADBLOCK AT FAYYADIYA BARRACKS. THE FAYYADIYA INCIDENTS HAD BEEN CONTAINED BUT THEY COULD HAVE WIDENED DANGEROUSLY. ONE RESULT COULD HAVE BEEN, KHADDAM COMMENTED (SOMEWHAT TO MY SURPRISE), THAT THE DISCIPLINE OF SYRIAN FORCES MIGHT HAVE DETERIORATED AND "OUR ARMY BECOME JUST ANOTHER MILITIA."

NOTE BY OC/T: PARA 1 AS RECEIVED.
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4. REFERRING OBLIQUELY TO POSSIBLE ISRAELI INVOLVEMENT,
KHADDAM SAID THAT SYRIA WELL KNEW THAT CERTAIN CHRISTINA

ELEMENTS REMAINED IN CLOSE CONTACT WITH ISRAEL AND MIGHT TRY TO JEOPARDIZE PUBLIC ORDER. "BUT THE ADF WILL NOT STAND IDLE AND WILL FACE DOWN ANY AND ALL CHALLENGERS TO ITS AUTHORITY." HE ALSO NOTED THAT DURING THE INITIAL CRITICAL DAYS SOME LEBANESE MUSLIMS IN WEST BEIRUT HAD TRIED TO GO INTO THE STREETS BEARING ARMS. THE ADF TOLD THEM TO STAND DOWN AND THEN BLOCKED THEIR OPERATIONS. WHATEVER FURTHER PROVOCATION THERE MAY BE TO JEOPARDIZE LEBANESE SECURITY, KHADDAM ASSERTED, SYRIA WILL GIVE SARKIS WHATEVER HELP HE NEEDS TO FOIL IT. ACCORDING TO THE INFORMATION IN DAMASCUS, HE ADDED, THE PALESTINIANS DID NOT REPEAT NOT TRY TO INTERFERE. HE DID NOT ANSWER MY QUESTION WHETHER HE COULD CONFIRM REPORTS THAT ADF HAD SINCE HANDED OVER RESPONSIBILITY FOR CERTAIN ROADBLOCKS IN BEIRUT TO PALESTINIANS.
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5. SYRIA IS PLEASED, KHADDAM CONTINUED, THAT A SPECIAL INVESTIGATIVE COMMITTEE AND MIXED COURT HAD BEEN SET UP. SARKIS, HENOTED WITH SATISFACTION, HAD GIVEN ORDERS TO THE ADF TO PUT DOWN ANY ATTEMPT AGAINST PUBLIC ORDER WHETHER IT COMES FROM LEBANESE, CHRISTIAN OR MUSLIM FRACTIONS OF FROM THE PALESTINIANS.

6. DISCUSSING THE WORK OF THE INVESTIGATIVE COMMITTEE AND THE JOINT COURT, KHADDAM ASSERTED THAT THEIR SCOPE WILL INCLUDE INVESTIGATION AND SENTENCING OF THOSE DEEMED CULPABLE OF THE FAYYADIYA INCIDENTS. (COMMENT: HIS EMPHASIS ON THIS POINT IS CURIOUS SINCE HE HAS SURELY BEEN INFORMED OF THE DECISION IN BEIRUT NOT TO PUNISH THOSE INVOLVED IN FAYYADIYA.)

7. I THEN ASKED ABOUT THE VALIDITY OF THE PRESS REPORT ATTRIBUTING A STATEMENT TO PRESIDENT ASSAD THAT THE REGULAR LEBANESE ARMY SHOULD BE DISBANDED. SAID I WAS AWARE OF SUBSEQUENT DENIAL BY A GROUP OF LEBANESE DEPUTIES AND CHAMOUN'S OWN COMMENTS THAT ASSAD WOULD NOT HAVE TAKEN SUCH A POSITION, BUT I WISHED TO HAVE KHADDAM'S DIRECT STATEMENT. WE ASSUMED THE INITIAL STORY HAD BEEN INACCURATE SINCE WE UNDERSTOOD SYRIA HAD CONSISTENTLY SUPPORTED THE REESTABLISHMENT OF THE LEBANESE ARMY AS A VALUABLE INSTRUMENT TO ASSURE LONG-RUN STABILITY AND HAD FURTHERMORE WELCOMED US ASSISTANCE TO THIS PURPOSE. KHADDAM REPLIED BRISKLY THAT THE STATEMENT ATTRIBUTED TO PRESIDENT ASSAD WAS "UNTRUE" NEVERTHELESS, HE CONTINUED, HE HAD GOTTEN THE IMPRESSION FROM LEBANESE LEADERS, BOTH CHRISTIAN AND MUSLIM, THAT THEY CONSIDERED THE NUCLEUS OF THE REGULAR FORCES--WHOM HE DESCRIBED AS "ONLY THEORETICALLY UNDER GENERAL KOURI'S COMMAND"--WERE ACTING ILLEGALLY AND WERE UNPREPARED TO OBEY THE LEBANESE

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PRESIDENT. AS PROOF OF THIS, KAHDDAM NOTED THAT FAYYADIYA BARRAKS OFFICERS HAD REFUSED SARKIS' ORDERS TO APPEAR BEFOR THE INVESTIGATIVE COMMITTEE. KHADDAM HAD THEN INTERMENED TO ARGUE THE CASE THAT THEY MUST APPEAR AND, ACCORDING TO HIS TELLING, MANAGED TO CONVINCE FRANJIEH, GEMAYEL AND CHAMOUN THAT THEY SHOULD SUPPORT SARKIS IN GETTING THESE OFFICERS TO APPEAR. THIS HAD NOW BEEN AGREED.

8. KHADDAM SAID THAT HE HAD BEEN STRUCK DURING HIS OWN ATTEMPTS IN BEIRUT LAST WEEK-END TO MEDIATE BY THE WORRY FELT BY ALL CHRISTIAN LEADERS ABOUT THE UNDISCIPLINED BEHAVIOR OF THEIR FOLLOWERS. EVEN THE CHRISTIAN LEADERS, KHADDAM ADDED, CONSIDERED THAT THE FORCES UNDER KHOURI'S COMMAND WERE NOT THE NUCLEUS OF A REAL NATIONAL ARMY. VERY FEW MUSLIMS WERE BARING ARMS AND EVEN THOSE WERE NOT REPEAT NOT YET FULLY INTEGRATED INTO REGULAR UNITS. "IN PRACTICE, EVERY GROUP GETS ITS ORDERS FROM A DIFFERENT POLITICAL FRACTION IN LEBANON." I COMMENTED THIS WAS A PRETTY DISMAL ASSESSMENT OF THE LEBANESE ARMY. DID SYRIA BELIEVE THAT THE ARMY'S DEVELOPMENT COULD BE DIRECTED ALONG A BETTER COURSE? KHADDAM REPLIED THAT "SYRIA HAD NO RIGHT TO INTERFERE IN THIS TYPE OF MATTER." THIS PROBLEM WAS ONE FOR THE LEBANESE AUTHORITIES TO SOLVE MERELY RELATING TO MY IMPRESSIONS HE HAD GAINED FROM LEBANESE LEADERS.
MURPHY

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